

Japanese American Sansei

(An Attempt to Theorize and Situate Japanese Buddhist Americans)

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Introduction

This study provides frameworks introducing key theories and studies pertaining to Buddhist temples in Hawaii and to their perceptions of their community in practice as they experience it. This selected research addresses issues that are relevant to all Japanese Buddhist Mahayana Temples working within the community and that are also relevant to an on-going research in Japanese American studies. The primary issues are societal changes reflected in the Temples.

The research questions guiding this study are also questions that direct the literature review. Embedded in these questions are remaining issues relating to the meaning of the experience and the roles emotions and previous life experience take part in constructing the meaning. These rooted issues are the nexus to the research question: "To what extent has assimilation affected the third generation Japanese American (Sansei)¹⁾." Although some of the literature does not specifically address Buddhist temples in Hawaii, related concepts and studies provide an overarching structure to explore the experience.

The Sansei, according to scholars during the 1970's (Ogawa, 1973; Kiefer, 1974), were acculturated or assimilated into the dominant American culture to the point that their values and custom emulated American mainstream lifestyle. Iga, (1966) for the Sansei stated, "their desire to be assimilated appears to be so complete and their knowledge of Japanese culture is so marginal that we cannot anticipate their return to tradi-

1) Sansei (三世, third generation) is a Japanese language term used in countries in North America, South America and Australia to specify the children of children born to Japanese people in the new country. The Nisei are considered the second generation; and the grandchildren of the Japanese-born immigrants are called *Sansei*. The *Sansei* are considered the third generation.

tional Japanese interests." Still, others predicted the demise of the Japanese community (Bonacich and Modell 1980; Montero 1980). Unlike the Nisei, which were influenced by their Issei parents' culture and experiences, young Sansei often rejected their parents and strongly assimilated into American mainstream society.

On the other hand, researchers (Arkoff 1959; Fenz and Arkoff, 1962; and Arkott Meredith. and Iwahara, 1962; Johnson, 1977) reported considerable retention of ethnic identity in the Sansei. It has been found that certain aspects of the more traditional Japanese household as well as values and adaptive systems associated with the traditional Japanese family system, have been retained in the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei including a sense of belongingness to their Japanese Buddhist religion (Caudill 1952, Arkott: 1959, and Connor, 1974a). The Sansei placed higher economically and educationally among other minority or white Americans that were labeled "super assimilated" (Fugita and O'Brien, 1991; Alba, 1985; Petersen, 1966). The Sansei did not experience the same degree of racism, immigration and land reform, or the effects of executive order 9066³⁾ against their ethnic group. With this in mind, the Sansei were later able to experience greater opportunity to discover their ethnic and cultural heritage, which to some extent could explain the revival of tradition and ethnic identity (Nagata, 1991).

The Japanese American assimilation case to some extent can be applied to Hansen's, (1952) law of "the principle of third generation interest" who hypostasized that at some point in time it would be highly likely that the Sansei will return to their cultural heritage. Hansen's Law is often used to interpret the immigrant experience. While the Child of an immigrant may devote substantial amount of energy to discarding their parent's cultural traits, his child (the grandchild) may find them identity forming and adopt some of them into his cultural repertory.

With the Japantowns slowly disappearing across the west coast and taken over by other Asian groups, and with the high rate of intermarriage³⁾, the Japanese community has transformed into a network community (Levine and Montero, 1973). Except for Hawaii, where Japanese Americans account for 29 percent of the population, most of the nation's 925,000 Japanese Americans are now greatly geographically spread out and assimilated to the point that they are culturally indistinguishable. With the current situation in mind, there has been a change in trend among the Sansei. The

3) United States Executive Order 9066 was a presidential executive order issued during World War II by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, using his authority as Commander-in-Chief to exercise war powers to send Americans of Japanese ancestry to internment camps.

3) In 1990, there were 39 percent more Japanese-white births than mono-racial Japanese American births. Mixed marriages are a statewide trend. Multiracial-ethnic births now outnumber both mono-racial Asian and black births in California, according to a 1997 report by the Public Policy Institute of California.

Sansei are extremely worried about the next generation that they are making great effort to revitalize cultural heritage in their daily life. Two examples of this specifically aimed at children are Japanese language schools and Japanese church basketball leagues. The language schools are not primarily concerned with producing fluent Japanese speakers, but rather with providing for the maintenance of Japanese culture through language exposure and traditional Japanese values. With the sudden decline of the Japanese community, it seems that Hansen Hypostasis on the return of the Sansei to their ancestor's cultural traditions has begun among the elder Sansei who are worried about their grandchildren, the fifth generation.

To better understand the situation, this study will as well address the West Coast Japanese American case. Much attention has been paid to preserving and reviving the country's last three Japantowns in San Francisco, San Jose and Los Angeles. The Sansei had made several attempts in trying to create reasons for the Japanese Americans to want to come to Japantowns, but these attempts have been short lived as other Asian Americans have taken business interest in the areas. The only physical place remaining where the once so-called Japanese American community can come together would be the Japanese American Buddhist temples.

When the Japanese first immigrated on the west coast and Hawaii, these Japanese Buddhist temples have served the Japanese community in various ways. Vos, (1975) states, that religion and ethnic identity strongly connect each other and religious. Even more so today, these temples remain the center to the declining Japanese community. These temples are extremely significant to the community in the sense that, it allows an actual physical place where cultural and traditional events can be shared with everyone in this ethnic community. In addition, these temples provide the Japanese Americans with a sense of belongingness which also brings a sense of stability to the ethnic individual. Vos, explains the function of religion regarding the formation of ethnic identity:

The use of religion to support ethnic identity is clear in the case of folk beliefs and practices. But Universalist faiths such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam can also contribute to ethnic group cohesion when sectarian differences become important as a matter of group loyalty and identification.

These Japanese Buddhist temples connect people who belong to the same ethnic and religious group which sociologically binds them stronger. Therefore, in this particular case religion functions as one of the most crucial cultural attributes to form ethnic identity. Finally the temple allows the younger generation of Yonsei and Gosei to identify themselves as both religiously and ethnically as Japanese Buddhist

Americans.

Theorizing and situating young Japanese American

The primary focus of this study is on ethnic and religious identity formation and its applicability to Japanese Buddhist Americans, I will describe ethnic identity and in the process, other issues such ethnic identification of intermarriage, and ethnic identification and mixed children as will become evident. The study will also investigate, why previous scholars assume that the Sansei would assimilate into mainstream society. For this reason, the researcher takes a critical look at the theory and research related to ethnic identity in the contexts of Japanese American Sansei. Criticisms are three types: methodological, definitional, and temporal and spatial.

Definitional Criticism

The use of different definitions for the terms ethnic identity has led to confusion in the literature regarding the dimensions and correlates of the concept of psychological ethnic identity. The researcher argues that ethnic identity has been defined too broadly as a catch-all term. Another concern was the artificial categorization of ethnic identity into types based on their alleged possession of particular characteristics for example, the social constructed form of customs, traditions, language, and religion. Just as there is confusion in the literature about the definition of ethnic identity, likewise, there is no clear consensus on the definition of assimilation and acculturation between generational transformation among Nisei, Sansei, and Yonsei.

Methodological Criticism

The methods used to study ethnic identity of Japanese American Sansei should be criticized. To begin with, there has been an over-reliance on survey data and quantitative methods. The items used to measure, such as the original Ethnic Identity Questionnaire or various modified versions, have been selected by researchers based on their own theoretical inclinations or personal experiences, rather than from an experience of the populations they are studying. Even this research to some degree is based on experiences of the researcher growing up in a Japanese Buddhist community. The questionnaire, however, is limited in that it only indicates the degree of Japaneseness it does not elicit the perspectives of the participants themselves; i.e., how the participants themselves perceive what Japaneseness is. For this reason, depending solely on questionnaires with Likert-scale will likely overlook emic perspectives regarding ethnic identity.

Temporal and Spatial Criticism

Limitation to time

An abundance of research was conducted on the Sansei from the early 1960's until the late 1970's. As slightly stated above, recently little research has been done on the ethnic identity of Japanese Americans. Possibly there has been declining interest in studying ethnic identity of Japanese Americans Sansei due to assumptions that the population has mainstreamed with American society. Recent research data on the upcoming generation includes data concerning Sansei that reveals that total assimilation did not happen as earlier scholars predicted they would. For obvious reasons we must assume that there is a time limitation to earlier studies and that the Sansei perception of mainstream American society has altered in their later age.

Geographical differences

Previous studies on Japanese Americans have only distinguished them geographically between the west coast and the Hawaiian cases. However for example, in Hawaii there are various Japanese communities on per se each island (Hawaii, Oahu, Maui, and Kauai), and within these islands are regional Japanese communities. The Japanese Americans on the Westside of the island of Hawaii is quite different culturally than the Japanese community on the Eastside of the island. In addition within the region there are still certain degrees of strong difference among work related issues that distinguish sugar plantation Japanese community and single family farming community (Kona coffee Japanese American community). The geographical differences criticism also suggests that researchers in the future should not make assumptions that all Japanese communities are the same in regards to ethnic identity among Japanese Buddhist Americans.

Ethnic Identity

In America, people from different countries have become Americans, but it has not been a simple process of assimilation. In the beginning, they formed ethnic groups. According to Bernard, (1972):

Ethnic group are people who have been brought up together under a particular cultural root: They share the same ways of doing things, the same beliefs and institutions, the same language and historical background What they have is not derived from any special biological or genetic traits, but comes to them as part of their cultural heritage, formed out of common responses to

common needs in the historical experience of their group

Phinney and Rotheram, (1987) stated that 'ethnic identity' is "one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership". Hicks, (1977) also stated that "ethnicity is thus of the same conceptual order as sex, age, kinship affiliation, political persuasion, religious membership, and so on." Campbell and Rew, (1999) also affirm that "ethnicity involves an attribution of identity to a minority by the majority; a relation and process intimately connected to issues of power, hierarchy, stratification, indeed to the nation state". Stack, (1986) confirmed that "ethnicity becomes a powerful identity merging the individual with the group. In its most constructive moments, ethnicity provides an answer to the question, 'who am I?'. He also made reference to "in sheltering the individual from loneliness, the ethnic group may offer a sense of self-worth-a reassurance that life has meaning and value," which in this study, a sense of community or network correlates with stability to the ethnic individual.

In this study, I refer to the term 'ethnic identity' as a subjective sense of self that is based on ancestral and traditional heritage. To better understand this socially constructed concept 'ethnic identity' is not simply biological, but rather is recognized and developed by an individual out of his/her ethnic heritage. Therefore, this study will focus on the Japanese Buddhist Americans who are Sansei, Yonsei, and their perceptions of themselves in relation to their ethnic identity and cultural heritage, regardless of how biased or misinterpreted their perceptions may be regarding their level of Japanese culture. Ethnic identity can be realized or symbolized in various situations. One could associate one's ethnic identity with cultural and traditional practices of: language, religion, customs, values, shared experiences, ceremonial events, foods, dress, and physical appearance (Hosokawa, 1973; Stephan and Stephan, 1989; Stephan, 1991, 1992; Kumekawa, 1993; Hall, 1997; Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, 1998; Adler, 1998). Japanese Americans' ethnic identities are not always fixed; they continuously change and particularly change from one generation to the next generation. Most culture has a predominant time-person perspective, which assists to organize temporal and personal categories with respect to past, present and future (Adler, 1998). Adler says that "for Japanese Americans, there are perceived [differences] in terms of generational distance from Japan". Adler also made reference to Japanese American ethnic identity and Japanese culture:

Finally, as a means of understanding and appreciating the culture of one's heritage, some participants attempted to embrace Japanese culture. They have taken the interest and time to learn about contemporary Japan, have visited Japan, learned to speak Japanese, and have reached out to the many Japanese

visitors to the United States. Several reports that they are indeed different from the Japanese "nationals" and that Japan is a foreign yet vaguely familiar country to them. Racially they feel a connection, but culturally, they feel less connection, just as many African Americans have often expressed more cultural connections with those whose families originated in America as slaves than with those still living in Africa.

Within the context of ethnic identity and religion, Horinouchi, (1973) studied a particular local Jodo Shin-Shu temple in Sacramento, California. The analysis, however, utilizes the local temple as a case study for sociological themes: Temple and sect, and acculturation and assimilation. As the organization evolved toward the formation of the ethnic community, it found itself adapting new social functions that had little to do with Buddhism and more to do with being a Japanese American. Thus, the organization centers on serving the needs of its members over those of the religion.

To further strengthen my case on the relationship between ethnic identity and religion, Sarsohn, (1983) says, "becoming a Christian was one way of beika, which means Americanization, for Japanese immigrants." The researcher also explained that "the Japanese had to become Americanized; so the churches of the time worked on Americanization and evangelism." The researcher continues, "An allegation that Christians had to cope with was that some were able to cooperate with Americans because they were Christians, whereas Buddhists could not do the same." Therefore, in my opinion, whether intentionally or unintentionally, one way in becoming assimilated in mainstream American society is to convert to Christianity.

Ethnic Identity of Sansei

During the civil rights period of the late 1960's and early 1970's, the Sansei identified themselves as Japanese while the Nisei identified themselves with both Japanese heritage and American values. When comparing the Nisei and Sansei with each other, it was found that the Sansei appeared to be in an intermediate position between the Nisei on one side and the American sample on the other, suggesting an acculturation process with Japanese Americans assimilating American patterns; yet, retaining some level of traditional Japanese patterns (Fenz and Arkoff, 1962; Masuda, 1970; Meredith and Meredith, 1973; Hosokawa, 1973; Connor, 1977).

In the case of Sansei living on the mainland, they found it necessary to develop a clear sense of ethnic identity as a way of dealing with persistent racism (Maykovich, 1972). With respect to the case in Hawaii, the experience of Sansei was different for the obvious reason of demographics and a higher degree of ethnic acceptance

(Magarifuji, 1982). The Japanese Americans in Hawaii were the dominant racial group comprising 36 percent of the population (Yamamoto, 1974; Lind, 1967). Newton, et.al, (1988), using the Ethnic Identity Questionnaire reported higher ethnicity scores than in previous studies suggesting an increased interest in ethnic identification among the Japanese Americans in Hawaii.

Quantitative studies have been used to measure to what degree Sansei have maintained their ethnic identity (Matsumoto et al., 1973; Meredith and Meredith, 1973; Montero, 1975; Israely, 1976; Connor, 1977; Seidman, 1995). There are many researchers with similar results that the Sansei have lost their Japaneseness when compared to the Issei and the Nisei, which implies that the Sansei are one step further to assimilating into mainstream American culture. Masuda, Matsumoto, and Meredith (1970) compared the magnitude of ethnic identification among three generations of Japanese Americans using the Ethnic Identity Questionnaire. The study showed a considerable residual of ethnic identification in the Sansei. The Sansei showed pride in Japanese ancestry, an appreciation of the value of Japanese cultural contributions, and a desire for the preservation and enjoyment of things Japanese.

Recently qualitative methods have been applied to the study of sense ethnic identity, promising a number of benefits. First, they may be more sensitive to the contextual nature of people's experiences. Second, they may allow researchers better access to the natural language people use to describe their experiences. Third, they help to enrich and diversify our understandings of the construct. In Qualitative studies which several scholars focused on the way in which different factors might be related to the ethnic identity of the Sansei through shared past experience (Hosokawa, 1973; Kendis, 1989) and cultural heritage (Adler, 1998). Hosokawa, (1973) conducted interviews and participant observation with Sansei at UCLA, and concluded that awareness of racial discrimination made the Sansei become very aware of their ethnicity.

Levin and Rhodes (1981) and Fugita and O'Brien (1991) examine Sansei ethnic identity in relation to the stability of a sense of community among Japanese Americans. Through analysis of interviews and questionnaires, Levin and Rhodes (1981) found that Sansei were increasingly assimilating into mainstream society, which has resulted in a diminished sense of community among Japanese Americans. However, Fugita and O'Brien's (1991) interview data indicate otherwise, namely there exists a persistence of community among Japanese Americans. They argue that Sansei found different meaning in the maintenance of ethnic identity from those of Issei and Nisei.

Magarifuji's (1982) interview data compared the ethnic identity of Sansei in Hawaii and Sansei in California. Her analysis was that these two groups are different in four

ways: (1) the cultural mainstream is less threatening for Hawaiian Sansei, (2) there is less conflict for Hawaiian Sansei due to higher degrees of ethnic acceptance in Hawaii, (3) Hawaiian Sansei do not feel restricted in moving between their ethnic community and the mainstream society, (4) Hawaiian Sansei have a more unified sense of ethnic identity since they can be part of the larger culture of Hawaii. She concludes that one of the major reasons why Sansei in Hawaii have a more unified sense of ethnic identity is that the ethnic culture of Japanese Americans in Hawaii is more accepted since it is similar to the larger culture of Hawaii.

In the past, there has been considerable interest in studying the preservation of ethnic identity among Nisei and Sansei. More recently; however, little research has been done on the ethnic identity of Japanese Americans. The lack of research is particularly evident in the Yonsei and mixed children.⁴⁾⁵⁾ Perhaps there has been diminished interest in studying the ethnic identity of Japanese Americans due to assumptions that the population has mainstreamed with American society and that current Japanese Americans, such as the Yonsei, are completely acculturated. Recent research on Japanese American Yonsei has suggested that the Yonsei are structurally assimilating while Japanese culture persists in the form of ethnicity (fugita and O'Brien, 1991). More recently, Akiyama (1988) used the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule to examine the extent of acculturation between Sansei and Yonsei. The study found the Japanese American sample to be lower on the variables of dominance and exhibition than the Caucasian sample. The study also found Japanese American females to be higher on the variable of nurturance than Caucasian females. These results suggest that complete acculturation has not set in.

3) *Ethnic Identification and Mixed Children*, the second generation, Nisei, had fairly low rates of intermarriage, which transformed into an insignificant number of racially mixed children among the Sansei. Therefore, during this generational transformation, we need to examine not only Yonsei, but also mixed heritage individuals of Japanese ancestry in order to analyze ethnic identity and religion at these Japanese American Buddhist temples.

Current studies have confirmed the significance of rethinking ethnic identity by including mixed heritage individuals (Hall, 1997; King, 1997; Mass, 1992; Root, 1997; Spickard, 1997). Such studies suggest that focusing primarily on the ethnic identity with a single ethnic background does not reveal the increasing multiculturalism of modern society.

Few studies on mixed heritage individuals' ethnic identity, Stephan and Stephan (1989) conducted questionnaires in order to explore the characteristics of ethnic identity among mixed heritage Japanese American and Hispanic American college students in Hawai'i.

5) Peterson, (2006), "Particularly influential in the developmental processes of a racial-ethnic identity in the U.S. were laws prohibiting interracial marriage. Although not restricted in all states, California enacted an anti-miscegenation law in 1905 that denied marriage between Caucasians and Mongolians (Spickard 1989). At this time, Japanese were considered members of the "Mongolian" race. Anti-miscegenation laws not only influenced ethnic identification, they also profoundly influenced family structure. Because the Issei were not allowed to intermarry in most states, there were few racially mixed Japanese children until the latter part of the twentieth century? The California law barring miscegenation was not overturned until 1948, and the right to interracially marry in the U.S. in its entirety was not legally guaranteed until 1967, when anti-miscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court".

Conclusion

Although some of the literature does not specifically address Japanese Buddhist temples in Hawaii, the related concept of ethnic identity studies provides an overarching structure to explore the relationship with religion. The main focus of this study was to examine, "To what extent has assimilation affected the third generation Japanese American (Sansei)".

Previous studies in the early 1960's on Japanese American Sansei deemed them on a path to total acculturation and assimilation. Their assessment on the west coast during that spatial and temporal context of the young Sansei experiencing the changing American mainstream society would definitely consider them assimilated. In terms of the Hawaiian case, the concentration of Japanese Americans is much higher in comparison to the west coast which, resulted in an increased acceptance of Japanese heritage and lower levels of assimilation to mainstream American society.

Although the Japantowns along the west coast are being taken over by other rising Asian groups, the Japanese American network is being revived. Recent research data on the Yonsei and mixed heritage includes data concerning Sansei that reveals they did not totally assimilate as earlier scholars predicted they would. In fact the data suggests that this generation is reviving their Japanese traditions and cultural heritage. Just recently the Sansei have in turn, implemented new programs and activities to restore and insure the ongoing continuation of these Japanese Buddhist temples. Both on the west coast and in Hawaii these Japanese Buddhist temples have become an even stronger central base to the Japanese American community.

As a result, this researcher has called for new research on the Sansei and the use of new methodologies that pay particular attention to the influences of the ever changing cultural and historical context of the community under study.

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